

**New Philippine president plans government overhaul**  
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**Neil Jerome Morales, Reuters**

The victor of the Philippines' presidential election, tough-talking city mayor Rodrigo Duterte, announced plans today for a radical overhaul of the country's unitary system of government that would empower the provinces.

Duterte's win in yesterday's polls has not been confirmed, but an unofficial count of votes by an election commission-accredited watchdog showed he had a huge lead over his closest rivals, one of whom has already conceded defeat.

By midmorning today, the rolling ballot count showed Duterte had almost 39 percent of votes cast. He was more than six million votes ahead of the second-placed candidate with 90 percent of votes counted from an electorate of 54 million.

Duterte's spokesperson, Peter Lavina, told a news conference in the southern city of Davao that the new president would seek a national consensus for a revision of the constitution to switch from a US-style system of government to a parliamentary and federal model.

The proposal to devolve power from Manila fits with Duterte's challenge as a political outsider to the country's establishment, which he has slammed as self-serving and corrupt.

The spokesperson said Duterte would also seek peace agreements with rebel groups in the south of the archipelago, where the outgoing government has been using force to quell militancy.

The 71-year-old's truculent defiance of political tradition has drawn comparisons with US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, as have his references to his libido.

That tapped into popular disgust with the ruling class over its failure to reduce poverty and inequality despite several years of robust economic growth. His campaign vows to crush crime and drug abuse also resonated with voters.

However, Duterte's incendiary rhetoric and advocacy of extrajudicial killings to stamp out crime and drugs have alarmed many who hear echoes of the Southeast Asian country's authoritarian past.

Duterte made a succession of winding, bellicose and at times comical remarks on television late yesterday as the votes were being counted, venting over corruption and bad governance and telling anecdotes from his 22 years as mayor of Davao city.

He said corrupt officials should "retire or die" and reiterated his support for police to use deadly force against criminals.

"If they put up a good fight and refuse to surrender and if you feel your life is in jeopardy, shoot. You have my authority," he told reporters in Davao, wearing a checked shirt and slouched in a chair.

He also said that he wouldn't go on any overseas state visits to places where the weather was cold.

### **Loaded with profanities**

In an early indication of his unorthodoxy, Duterte told reporters yesterday that if he became president he would seek multilateral talks to resolve disputes over the South China Sea.

The outgoing administration of President Benigno Aquino has asked a court of arbitration in The Hague to recognise its right to exploit waters in the South China Sea, a case it hoped could bolster claims by other countries against China in the resource-rich waters.

Duterte said negotiations should include Japan, Australia and the United States, which is traditionally the region's dominant security player and contests China's development of islands and rocky outcrops in the sea.

The influential Chinese state-run tabloid the *Global Times*, said yesterday that "if there is anything that can be changed by Duterte, it will be diplomacy".

"China will not be too naive to believe that a new president will bring a promising solution to the South China Sea disputes between Beijing and Manila. Only time will tell how far the new leader, be it Duterte or not, will go toward restoring the bilateral relationship."

Duterte's entertaining speeches, often loaded with profanities, have shed little light on his policies beyond going after gangsters and drug pushers.

He has been vague on what he would do to spur an economy that has averaged growth at around six percent under outgoing President Benigno Aquino.

In a report yesterday, ratings agency S&P Global said a Duterte presidency would create uncertainty, especially if he picks fights with the political elite.

"He could take some time getting used to the many compromises required in the national leadership position," it said.

One indication of that came yesterday as Duterte told reporters he planned to loosen restrictions on foreign ownership of companies across all industries, which could meet with resistance from protectionist forces.

One of Duterte's economic advisers told *Reuters* spending on education would be lifted to benefit "disadvantaged regions" and agriculture and rural development will be prioritised to spread wealth more evenly across the country.

"Everything seems to be in imperial Manila," said Ernesto Pernia, professor emeritus of economics at the University of the Philippines. "He wants to give more attention to the lagging, the backward regions."

Pernia said the pursuit of tax evaders and corrupt officials should bolster government revenues to fund extra spending.

- *Reuters*